DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 447 571 EA 030 721

AUTHOR	Luebke, Robert V.
TITLE	Homeschooling in Wisconsin: A Review of Current Issues and Trends. Report.
INSTITUTION	Wisconsin Policy Research Inst., Milwaukee.
PUB DATE	1999-07-00
NOTE	35p.; For other volumes of this report, see EA 030 719 and EA 030 720.
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Serials (022)
JOURNAL CIT	Wisconsin Policy Research Report; v12 n4 Jul 1999
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Academic Achievement; *Academic Standards; *Access to Education; *College Admission; College Bound Students; Educational Supply; Elementary Secondary Education; Equal Education; *Home Schooling; *Nontraditional Education; Parents as Teachers; Reentry Students; *Student Adjustment; Student Attitudes; Student Evaluation
IDENTIFIERS	Wisconsin; *Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction

ABSTRACT

While homeschooling has grown by 1,500 percent in Wisconsin in the past 15 years, it is not a threat to traditional education in the state. Analysis of Wisconsin respondents in one national study indicates 85 percent describe themselves as "Born Again" Christians; were largely middle-class, white, two-parent families, with instruction provided by at-home mothers; and exhibited average extracurricular participation rates. Recent homeschool families are more secular, primarily motivated by academic concerns. Influential homeschooling lobbying organizations helped defeat legislation weakening parental control and increasing state regulation. Recent policy debates involving supporters and opponents of homeschooling focus on three issues: (1) access to public-school courses and services for students primarily schooled at home, welcomed by many, but opposed by others concerned about undermining opportunities and increasing costs for traditional students; (2) opposition by parents to efforts to subject their children to state academic testing requirements; and (3) the impact of homeschooling on colleges in Wisconsin. Opponents of homeschooling express concerns about accountability and denial of social benefits of public schools. Proponents argue the majority of homeschooled students who return to traditional schools during middle-school years do not experience transition difficulties. Sentiment for more restrictive homeschooling legislation does not currently exist. Little evidence suggests homeschooling threatens traditional schools or is socially or academically harmful to students. Although the absence of significant data on performance should be addressed, policymakers should consider homeschooling an effective alternative to traditional education. (Contains 63 endnotes.) (TEJ)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 447 571

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. Miller

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

1

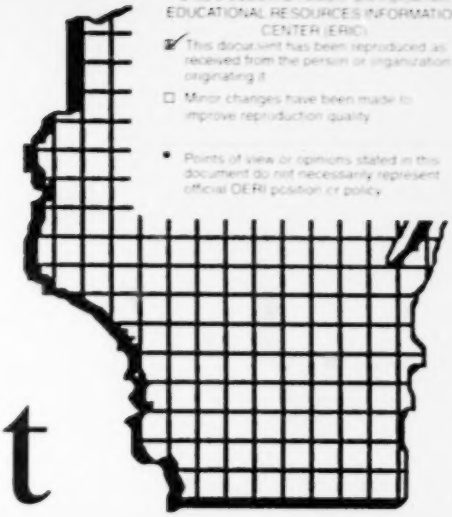
Wisconsin Policy Research Institute Report

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☑ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.



July 1999 Volume 12, Number 4

Homeschooling in Wisconsin

A Review of Current Issues and Trends

EA030721

REPORT FROM THE PRESIDENT:

Over the past decade there have been radical changes in Wisconsin's educational system. The state has become a major innovator in educational reform. We now have charter schools, public and private choice programs, and a number of other substantive changes. Yet no area has accelerated more rapidly than homeschooling. We asked Dr. Robert Luebke, an educational researcher with professional and personal experience in homeschooling, to examine this issue in Wisconsin. His study paints a picture of educational expansion that has been totally below the surface of public policy debates.

Dr. Luebke's statistics show that homeschoolers would form one of the largest educational districts in the state. The numbers in his study only count students whose parents have filed forms with the Department of Public Instruction. There are certainly additional homeschooled students in Wisconsin whose parents have not registered with the Department of Public Instruction. The totals today could easily be between 20,000 and 25,000 students homeschooled in Wisconsin. The impact is startling. Depending on your point of view, homeschooling either saves taxpayers hundreds of millions of dollars, or takes tax dollars away from public schools because local students are not in public school systems.

More to the point, homeschooling is a clear demonstration of unhappiness with the current public school system among a number of parents in Wisconsin. These parents believe they can provide better opportunities for their children than educational bureaucracies.

Almost by definition homeschooling parents are not interested in institutional data, and there are still many answers that we need from homeschooled children. Potentially one of the most interesting is exactly what happens to them educationally after they reach high school graduation age. This study does not answer that question, because data is not currently available. Rather Dr. Luebke poses the types of questions that Wisconsin should be seriously examining over the next decade to see how homeschooled children can be helped as we enter the next millennium.

James H. Miller

WISCONSIN POLICY
RESEARCH INSTITUTE, INC.
P.O. Box 487 • Lake Geneva, WI 53147
414-248-0514 • Fax 414-248-0524
E-mail: wpri@execpc.com • Internet: www.wpri.org

HOMESCHOOLING IN WISCONSIN

A Review of Current Issues and Trends

ROBERT V. LUEBKE, PH.D.

	PAGE
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	1
OVERVIEW	3
THE ORIGINS OF HOMESCHOOLING IN WISCONSIN	5
THE FACE OF HOMESCHOOLING IN WISCONSIN	12
CURRENT CONCERNS AND IS WISCONSIN'S HOMESCHOOLING LAW WORKING?	21
CONCLUSIONS	27
ENDNOTES	28

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Robert Buchanan, *Chairman*
Roger Fitzsimonds
Michael Grebe
Roger Hauck
James Klauser
San Orr, Jr.
Robert O'Toole
Brenton Rupple
Paul Schierl
Edward Zore
James Miller, *President*

Executive Summary

Lost amidst the clamor of school reform efforts in recent years has been the steady expansion of homeschooling in Wisconsin. Over the past fifteen years, homeschooling enrollments have risen over 1500 percent. Although homeschoolers still comprise less than 2 percent of all school age children, the steady growth of the movement has surprised many. The close to 19,000 home-educated students would comprise one of the largest school districts in the state — surpassed only by Milwaukee and a handful of the larger urban districts.

The last decade-and-a-half has brought many changes. Fifteen years ago, hardly anyone knew children who were educated at home. Now homeschoolers are commonplace in many neighborhoods. Not surprisingly, these developments have caught the attention of educators and policymakers across the state. Public support for home education has been difficult to discern. However, as of late, public support has been warming as more parents look more closely at homeschooling and more home-educated students return to school or go on to college.

Still questions remain. Many educators and administrators believe state law should be amended to give government greater regulatory authority over homeschooling. Home educators vehemently oppose the idea, believing the right to educate one's child is fundamental, and cannot be granted or taken away by the government. Homeschooling proponents believe the evidence of higher than average test scores and well adjusted students speaks for itself. Encouraged by promising preliminary results, home education advocates wonder if the state should do more to encourage the practice? Still, a more significant question has arisen from this conversation: Is homeschooling a legitimate alternative to traditional educational institutions?

The intent of this report is to provide information to help answer that question. To do so, this work focused on three questions.

1. What are the origins of the modern homeschooling movement?
2. Who homeschools in Wisconsin?
3. Do recent developments warrant changes in the laws governing homeschooling?

This report found:

- Homeschooling is not a threat to traditional education in Wisconsin. While enrollments expanded in the late eighties at a rate of 25 and 30 percent annually, homeschooling involves a small fraction of students. Over the past three years, home-based enrollments have grown at an average rate of 11.6 percent. The majority of home-educated students still live in rural areas. However, in recent years some of the state's largest school districts have shown significant increases in homeschooling populations.
- Opposed to the direction of public education, critics from the Liberal Left and Christian Right helped to birth the modern homeschooling movement in Wisconsin.
- Religion has been a significant influence in the homeschooling movement in Wisconsin. Many homeschooling organizations, small groups and activities are oriented around faith or religious practices. Evangelical Christians have a strong presence in the movement. An analysis of Wisconsin families participating in a national homeschooling study showed that 85 percent of parents surveyed described themselves as "Born Again" Christians.
- Wisconsin homeschooling families participating in the above study were middle class, white, two-parent families, where the mother stayed at home, and did most if not all the teaching. Contrary to popular opinion, homeschoolers are very active socially, with participation rates in extracurricular activities similar to, and in some cases higher than, traditionally educated students.
- Those joining the ranks of homeschoolers in recent years have views decidedly different from their predecessors. Many of the newest home educators are secular and nonpolitical in outlook and are motivated primarily by academic concerns.
- The leadership of strong grass roots organizations such as the Wisconsin Parents Association and the Christian Home Educators Association has contributed to the success of the home education movement in Wisconsin. Groups like these have made homeschoolers an influential lobbying group and helped in the defeat of legislative measures designed to weaken parental control and increase state regulation of homeschooling.

Recently much of the policy debate about homeschooling has focused around three issues:

Shared Services

In recent years homeschoolers have sought increased access to public school services. Those on both sides of the debate have mixed feelings about the impact of shared services legislation. Administrators believe the legislation may lead to higher costs and cause some students to be shut out of desired classes. Home education proponents contend the law's provision that homeschoolers comply with a school's formal admission requirements constitutes discrimination. They also fear legislation granting homeschoolers access to courses and services in public schools may actually lead to increased regulation.

Academic Testing

The current momentum in favor of standardized testing has made many homeschoolers apprehensive. Although currently exempt from testing regulations, homeschoolers strongly oppose the use of such tests. They believe tests are another means to control what is taught, by whom, and when. Such requirements effectively transfer control of education from the parents to the educational system. A number of questions emerge from these concerns.

1. What will happen to homeschoolers who perform poorly?
2. Can homeschoolers get a fair shake from teachers and administrators, many of whom oppose educating children at home?
3. Who will decide these issues?

Homeschooling and College

Despite expectations, homeschooling students have had little impact on enrollment at the state's colleges and universities. Figures from the University of Wisconsin revealed only 32 homeschooled students entered the system as new freshmen last fall. Private colleges around the state reported similar enrollment figures. Observers say two factors may help to explain the data. Homeschoolers may choose to avoid large public colleges and universities for the same reasons that motivated them to homeschool throughout grade school or high school. Furthermore, many homeschoolers demonstrate a pattern of entering college early or late. Should these interpretations not be true, a very large percentage of homeschoolers remains unaccounted for after twelfth grade. Verifying these interpretations and data on the academic performance of homeschoolers are two areas in need of additional efforts.

- Most believe Wisconsin's homeschooling law is working well. Opponents faulted the law for its lack of accountability. However, claims that the law produced maladjusted students unable to work remain unsubstantiated. In recent years, homeschooling advocates have gained support from legislators on both sides of the aisle, many of whom view the movement as a means of empowering parents and enabling educational reform efforts. These sentiments reflect a lack of political support for changes in Wisconsin's homeschooling law.
- Homeschoolers cite much anecdotal evidence and a variety of national research studies in support of the practice. Still, this report finds a need to conduct additional research on homeschooling families in Wisconsin. Questions for investigation may include:
    1. How do home-educated students perform academically in high school and college?
    2. What are the career paths of homeschooled students after high school?
    3. What factors influence these decisions?
    4. How do homeschooled students perform in the work world?

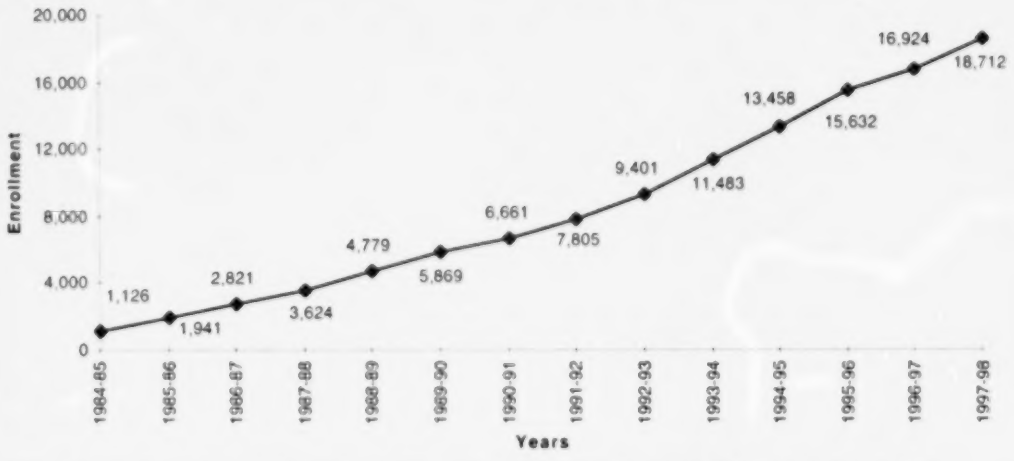
Homeschooling can result in significant savings of educational resources. State support per public school pupil in 1997-98 was approximately $4,940. Hence, the 18,303 students — pre-K students are excluded from our calculation — who were homeschooled in the 1997-98 school year saved the state approximately $90,416,820. Conservative estimates of total savings since the mid 1980s would certainly reach several hundred million dollars. Since much local evidence suggest most homeschooled students do as well academically, if not better, than traditionally educated students, decision makers would do well to take a close hard look at the economic benefits of homeschooling. That homeschooling continues to expand in Wisconsin and elsewhere suggests students and parents find homeschooling an attractive alternative to traditional education. Ensuring that public policy balances parental rights and freedoms with the state's responsibility to guarantee an educated citizenry must continue to be the central focus of parents and policymakers involved in resolving this important issue.

OVERVIEW

Sixteen years ago members of the National Commission on Excellence in Education convened to take stock of the nation's educational system. In now-famous words, the Commission's final report warned, "Our Nation is at risk,...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people."[1] For the past fifteen years, parents and policymakers in Wisconsin and nationally have focused on how to fix a system gone wrong. A flurry of administrative and instructional initiatives — including new academic standards, site-based management and school choice, as well as incentives to bring more technology to the classroom — have been introduced in hopes of improving school accountability and educational outcomes.

While the debate over how to remedy the ills of our nation's schools continues unabated on the local, state, and national levels, far removed from the lobbyists and educational establishment, an interesting but little reported

FIGURE 1 HOME-ENROLLMENT IN HOME-BASED EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN WISCONSIN 1984-85 — 1997-98



Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Home-Based Private Educational Program Enrollment Trends, 1984-85 — 1997-98, September 1998.

trend is emerging: more and more families in Wisconsin are removing their children from local schools or choosing not to enroll them in traditional educational settings. Instead, growing numbers of parents are educating their children at home. Homeschooling — as the practice is commonly called — is becoming the option of choice for parents who are skeptical of reform efforts and increasingly distrustful of the intentions of the educational establishment.

Department of Public Instruction (DPI) data reveal enrollment in home-based education programs has grown steadily from 1,126 in 1984-85 — the first year figures were available — to 18,712 students for academic year 1997-98.[2] Figure 1 illustrates these trends. Just how large is the homeschooling population in Wisconsin? If all home-educated students were placed in one school district, the district would be the sixth largest in the state and would approximate the combined 1997-98 enrollments of the Sheboygan and Stevens Point Area school districts. Put another way, if all 18,000 plus homeschooled students were assembled in one area, the Bradley Center in Milwaukee would need an additional eighty more places to seat everyone.

While home-educated students still represent less than two percent of all school-age children in Wisconsin, the growth of the movement has caught the attention of education observers. Since 1984, the homeschooling population has increased 1,562 percent. Over the past five years, homeschooling enrollment has expanded at an annual rate of 14.8 percent.[3] Accompanying this growth, has come increased coverage of homeschooling by the national and local press.[4] Nearly all the major newspapers in Wisconsin —including the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* and the *Wisconsin State Journal* — ran articles on homeschooling last year.

Ten years ago, few people, if any, knew what homeschooling was, much less knew anyone — parent or student — who actually was involved with the practice. Today, however, it is not unusual to have several homeschooled children right in your neighborhood. While homeschooling seems to be more prevalent, public sentiment on the topic is hard to discern. As might be expected, members of the traditional educational establishment have been quick to condemn the practice and call for greater state regulation. For the better part of the past fifteen years, homeschoolers have fought an uphill battle with the Department of Public Instruction and most teachers unions over the control and administration of home-based education programs. In recent years, the state's largest newspapers have echoed similar sentiments. The *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* described the growing concerns of school officials about the large jump in the area homeschooling population, while a November 8, 1998, story on homeschooling in the *Wisconsin State Journal* repeatedly cited homeschooling successes but also noted that the enterprise remains largely unregulated.[5]

National polls on public attitudes toward homeschooling have demonstrated a slow but steady trend toward public acceptance. The 29th Gallup Poll on public attitudes toward schools shows a continued softening of opposition to homeschooling since the survey began asking the question twelve years ago. In 1985, the Gallup poll showed only 16 percent of respondents considered homeschooling a "good thing," while 73 percent said it was a "bad thing." The remaining 11 percent were undecided. In 1997, the same poll reports 36 percent said homeschooling was a "good thing," 57 percent viewed it as "bad thing", while only 7 percent had no opinion.[6] The October 5, 1998, issue of *Newsweek* magazine devoted its lead story to the growing and changing homeschooling movement. The article highlighted how recent growth has helped to diversify the movement and change public attitudes. It even wondered aloud if, with these changes, homeschooling was going "mainstream." Not surprisingly, some of these recent changes seem to be noticeable in Wisconsin. The current Superintendent has sought a more civil and cooperative relationship with the homeschooling community. Furthermore, more administrators and teachers seem to be accepting of homeschooling's strengths and weaknesses — perhaps, in part, because many home-educated children are starting to reenter schools where many of these educators work and teach.

Today, thousands of children are homeschooled in Wisconsin. Despite the growing numbers, knowledge about homeschooling remains sketchy and the opposition vocal. Many members of the educational community remain opposed to the practice. They fear the lack of resources, untrained staff and limited opportunities to interact with other students shortchanges students and produces undesirable outcomes. Teachers have complained that home-educated students do not have the skills to compete academically at designated grade levels, and that parents do not always have the skills to properly teach children. Administrators wonder how to ensure students educated at home comply with the state's new academic standards. For many homeschooling opponents, the only remedy is greater regulation of homeschooling.

Still others fear the social consequences of homeschooling. The typical view of much of private and homeschooling is that it has a corrosive effect on American public life. Christian Smith and David Sikkink articulate this stereotype well when they state:

> ...[M]any popular stereotypes about private schools and home-education directly feed into concerns about the social consequences of private schooling. The popular imagination easily conjures up images of severe, anti-intellectual, Bible-thumping, fundamentalist Christian schools that indoctrinate rather than educate their students; of Volvo-driving parents emerging from their affluent gated communities to drop their children off at exclusive private academies the central purpose of which is to reproduce class privilege; of born-again parents, fearful of alleged secular humanism, pulling their kids out of public schools to give them amateur educations in the small worlds of their own private homes. How, one might wonder, will these kids ever learn to understand and share a society with other people very different from themselves? How can these families ever pull themselves out of what seem to be narrow worlds of religious purity, financial affluence, and family reclusivity in order to participate in shared American public life?[7]

How do homeschoolers respond to these claims? Most continue to teach children at home and be involved with local homeschooling groups. Still others point with pride to above average scores on national tests and the growing body of recent research that supports the practice.[8]

Developments mentioned here suggest the issue of homeschooling is gaining importance. Reform efforts have cast a spotlight on many alternative forms of education including school choice and charter schools. As such, policymakers have the responsibility to look more closely at homeschooling. The current law governing home-based education programs — Wisconsin Statutes, Chapter 118 — was passed in 1984. However, it is important to note, the legislation has not been amended or changed since then.

Is homeschooling a legitimate alternative to traditional educational institutions? Should public policy encourage homeschooling? Are changes needed in current law to protect the rights of homeschoolers and parents, as well as the rights of the state? This report provides information to help policymakers answer those questions. Specifically, this work will address three important questions.

1. What are the origins of homeschooling in Wisconsin?
2. Who homeschools in Wisconsin?
3. Do current developments necessitate changes in public policy toward homeschooling?[9]

Our attention now turns to a detailed discussion of these topics.

The Origins of Homeschooling in Wisconsin

Overview

The homeschooling movement in Wisconsin is growing, diverse, and sophisticated. While this is not the time to recount historical details, a cursory review of history reveals that the roots of modern homeschooling in Wisconsin reach back over one hundred and fifty years. Throughout much of the 19th century, parents in rural states like Wisconsin played an active part in teaching their children not only reading and writing, but also right and wrong. During the second half of the 19th century, however, a confluence of factors — including industrialization, the growth of public education, compulsory attendance laws, and shifting views about the family and the aims of public education — led to a steady decline in the number of parents in the state who educated their children at home.[10] Beginning in the 1960s these trends began to change. Changing values and the growing appeal of home education to religious and disenfranchised groups helped to reverse a decades-long decline in enrollments and led to the birth of the modern homeschooling movement in Wisconsin.

External Influences

For the most part, the major factors contributing to the reemergence of homeschooling in Wisconsin during the past thirty years, have been national in scope. Emboldened by the nation's success in World War II and increasingly aware of the Soviet threat, policymakers in the postwar era turned to the schools as a means of furthering national goals. In the wake of the Sputnik scare of the-mid fifties, conservatives pushed for — and won — curricular reforms in math and science. These reforms not only provided substantial federal moneys for education, but what is more important, shifted the locus of policy control from the states to Washington.

During the 1960s, the role of the Federal government in education continued to expand. The Kennedy administration marked the transfer of leadership to a new generation. Guided by the "Best and the Brightest," the outlook was optimistic, the politics liberal, and the vision writ large in grandiose terms, such as the New Frontier and the Great Society. In this new society, education was the primary tool the state employed for remedying social injustice and ensuring economic opportunity. The decades of the sixties and seventies saw passage of new Federal programs to further both these goals. Programs were designed to foster integration in the nation's schools, eliminate discrimination, and provide educational and economic assistance for minorities and low income families. Affirmative action programs to help redress the claims of underrepresented groups were also begun during this period. These initiatives spanned the age spectrum, from Head Start for low-income preschool children, to financial assistance for college students, to career and employment assistance. For better or worse, the growing list of education programs and expanding jurisdiction were unmistakable signs that both government and the courts were taking a more active role in the development and administration of education policy.

Unfortunately for advocates of many of these policies, the tenor and direction of the nation did not match the ambition of the Federal legislative agenda. Those who witnessed the sixties, saw a nation at war with itself. Rising anti-authoritarianism and growing social tensions gave rise to questions about the nation's destiny, its values, and its faith in government institutions to solve societal problems. By the 1970s, the optimism and hope so present at the start of the sixties was lost. The hard reality was the expenditure of billions of dollars on the schools by Federal and

state governments produced little in the way of academic or social results. Fallout was evident in several areas. First, declining test scores and growing opposition to how schools were funded and managed reopened the debate over education policy. Second, the idea that schools were the engines of democracy that shaped the younger generation and instilled a respect for the common good and civic virtue — so prevalent in earlier times — seemed a distant memory and worse yet, untrue.

This gnawing reality struck at the soul of public education in America. It cast doubt on the whole idea of the common school. Kirschner sums up the scope and significance of these sentiments when he writes, "By the 1970s, the faith in a national destiny that shaped American dreams throughout the 19th century was lost, as was the faith in human agency to solve social problems. Gone was the belief that public schools could shape a virtuous citizenry. Instead feelings of powerlessness and meaninglessness came to predominate."[11]

For many, this time signified the death of the common school ideal and its vision of national cohesion and greatness. While much of the nation was rethinking what was wrong with the nation's schools and how to fix them, voices on both the left and the right gave rise to alternatives to traditional education. It was in this context that many of the early ideas that gave rise to homeschooling began to emerge. Two early pioneers of the home education movement were also some of the most vocal critics of traditional education. John Holt and Raymond Moore both questioned the traditional mission of the schools as agencies for molding the young, but came at the problem from opposite perspectives. Holt confided in the humanist left. While Moore's message resonated with many Evangelical Christians. Their work and influence helped to energize and diversify the homeschooling movement in Wisconsin and nationally.

John Holt, a former teacher, worked tirelessly to make education more holistic. His views toward traditional education and his pilgrimage toward homeschooling are described in two books, *How Children Fail* (1964) and *Teach Your Own* (1981). In brief, Holt believed schools had simply become too bureaucratic and powerful and had lost the capacity to display true humanity toward school children. The centralization of power, coercive nature of schooling, and emphasis on reciting pat answers stifled the natural curiosity of children and retarded self-directed learning.[12]

To remedy these concerns, Holt sought to empower parents and students to take control of the schools. Holt called for more student and teacher involvement in running the schools and extending school outside the four walls and into the community. Initially, Holt urged parents to work within the system for change. However, he soon became frustrated by the lack of commitment among parents and the educational bureaucracy's ability to thwart meaningful change.

These experiences profoundly shaped Holt's educational philosophy. He came to see schools as artificial and oppressive places at odds with true learning. True learning, Holt concluded, occurs best in natural environments, nurtured by encouragement and loving interaction. As such, home — not school — was the best place for learning to occur.

Holt's ideas soon gained support among families throughout the nation. Holt's ideas and philosophies soon became known as the "free school movement." Free schoolers called for more freedom and respect — not coercion — between parents and schools, and urged teachers to be on the side of the students. As these ideas spread, Holt began a national organization, Growing Without Schooling. He also started a newsletter to spread his ideas to those who had also removed children from traditional educational settings.

His efforts brought together groups of advocates — mostly on the left — tired of authoritarian structures and searching for a fresh approach to education. His critique of public education called for parents to educate at home. Holt gave parents a strong case for doing so and helped equip a generation of parents with new skills to foster learning and creativity in their children. His ideas have had a significant influence on many homeschooling families in the state. The strong nonschooling philosophy espoused by many local and statewide homeschooling groups is Holt's legacy to educators in Wisconsin.

At the same time that Holt was critiquing public education, Evangelical Christians were growing increasingly disillusioned with educational systems that failed to teach parental values. The expansion of government control over education had left many parents feeling helpless and alienated. One of the more vocal opponents of increased government control over education was Raymond Moore. Moore, a former missionary and Department of Education employee, devoted much of his professional life to answering two questions:

1. Is bringing children into formal institutional school settings at an early age, sound educational policy?

2. What age is best for children to enter school?

Moore's research solicited opinions from family development specialists and research experts. Many of those he questioned found early institutionalization socially harmful to children. Others expressed concern about the uncertain or harmful effects early schooling has on the development of the child's nervous system. Moore's analysis of hundreds of studies found that developmental problems — such as dyslexia or hyperactivity — were often traceable to forcing a child to do continuous academic tasks, like reading or writing, when they were not developmentally prepared. Other studies he reviewed even advocated raising the age when children would enter formal schooling.[13]

The net result of these efforts was to refocus Moore's research on the questions concerning socialization and when to expose children to formal learning. This path eventually led to his interest in homeschooling. In the 1980s, Moore's books, *Home-Grown Kids* and *Home-Spun Schools*, became immensely popular in the emerging homeschooling community. The books, unlike Holt's work, were decidedly conservative in outlook. These works set out a case why parents should educate children at home and offered parents practical help on how to succeed in home education. Equally important, however, the books' Christian perspective spoke to the growing numbers of homeschooling Evangelicals and Catholics looking for ways to meet their children's developmental needs, while living true to the Christian faith.

In many respects, the ideas of Holt and Moore — while directed at different populations — combined to help lay the foundation for the modern homeschooling movement. Holt provided an opportunity for many on the cultural left to express opposition to the educational establishment. The 1980s saw new dynamics emerge. Homeschooling provided a means for many religiously conservative families to protect their children from an increasingly hostile and secularized world. Moore's message resonated with many on the right and provided practical help on how to educate children at home. Recently, the decade of the nineties has witnessed yet another change in dynamics. A third wave of families has entered the homeschooling ranks and challenged assumptions and previous stereotypes. Motivated more by concerns about academics and school culture, and less by religious or political concerns, a new group of home educators has emerged from so-called "middle America" causing many to wonder if homeschooling has gone mainstream.[14]

Internal Influences

While large scale cultural, social, and economic forces played a significant role in the development of homeschooling in Wisconsin, internal developments also helped to shape the movement. Two of the most significant influences include:

1. Passage of legislation favorable to the rights and freedoms of homeschooling families; and
2. Evolution of the home education movement into an effective grass root and lobbying organization.

Passage of Homeschooling Legislation

The release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 thrust the subject of education reform to the top of the policy agenda. At the state level, the Wisconsin Legislature was considering various plans to improve academic standards, accountability, and school financing. Despite the flurry of activity and the promise of reform, many parents had had enough with the endless stream of reform efforts. Growing numbers were already making the decision to educate their children at home. Even though there are no records on homeschooling enrollments during the late seventies or early eighties — the Department of Public Instruction only began keeping records on enrollments for home-based education programs only in 1984 — it is not unreasonable to suggest that the homeschooling population in Wisconsin during that time probably numbered around several thousand.[15]

While attractive for many, homeschooling was no easy option for parents. Public opinion was not supportive of the practice. Widespread skepticism from the general public and educational community kept scores of homeschoolers underground. Misunderstandings about the goals of the movement, as well as fears generated by countercultural stereotypes, contributed to frequent crackdowns on homeschoolers in many areas of Wisconsin. Those who choose to homeschool encountered a variety of practical problems. To comply with existing law, parents were forced to choose one of two options. They would either have to gain approval of a home tutorial program through the Department of Public Instruction, or declare their home a private school. The choice made many homeschoolers anxious and afraid. Applying for a private school status was risky. Although those who chose this status were on solid legal ground, most parents were unlikely to do so because of uncertainty about just what a private school was. The decision to declare their home a private school was also likely to generate greater scrutiny by public education officials, something most home educators could live without.[16]

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

In 1983, events took a turn for the better for many homeschoolers in Wisconsin. That year a homeschooling family named Popanz had been charged with truancy on the grounds that their home was not a private school. The case went to the State Supreme Court. In *Popanz v. Wisconsin* the Court declared the state's compulsory school attendance law void for vagueness, since the law failed to define a private school. The ruling made it impossible to prosecute homeschoolers under a statute that did not first define what a private school was. What is more important, the decision underscored the need for the Legislature to clearly define private and home-based schools.

In the fall of 1983, the Legislature started the process to do just that. Assembly Bill 887, drafted in large part by the state's educational establishment, defined home-based educational programs as instruction elsewhere than at school, and substantially equivalent to public or private school. Under the terms of the legislation, parents with home-based education programs were required to gain approval of the educational program from the Department of Public Instruction. Alarmed and concerned over the direction of these developments, a group of homeschoolers met in Stevens Point in January 1984 to plan a strategy to oppose AB 887. At the meeting, attendees formed the Wisconsin Parents Association (WPA), a network of individuals committed to supporting homeschooling and to educating the public about home education.[17]

It wasn't long before WPA was off and running. On March 13, 1984, WPA helped to assemble over 2,500 people in the Capitol Rotunda to oppose AB 887. In an effort to change provisions requiring that the Department of Public Instruction approve all applications for home-based education programs, homeschoolers presented testimony before the Senate Health, Education, Corrections, and Human Services Committee highlighting past mistreatment by DPI of home educators who had applied for approval of home tutorial programs. Testimony presented at the hearing included family members who had been harassed or treated unfairly by the DPI during their attempts to get information about homeschooling and/or gain approval of their home-based program from the DPI. Presenters also recounted unannounced visits by the DPI, requirements on parents to hire a certified teacher to work with children, and burdensome DPI record keeping requirements regarding how subjects were taught, by whom, and when.[18]

The testimony and rally had a profound effect on Legislators. Soon thereafter, the Legislature dropped provisions calling for DPI approval of homeschooling programs and definitions. Instead, new language, more favorable to homeschoolers was passed. The new legislation requires individuals participating in home-based instructional programs to agree that:

1. The primary purpose of the program must be to provide private or religiously-based instruction;
2. The program must be privately controlled;
3. The program must not be operated to circumvent the compulsory attendance law; and
4. The program must provide at least 875 hours of instruction in an essentially progressive curriculum of fundamental instruction.[19]

The law requires administrators of home-based education programs to verify these requirements annually. In addition, parents and guardians must attest that they are not homeschooling to avoid the compulsory school attendance law. Parents who fail to satisfy requirements are subject to truancy procedures outlined in Section 118.16(5) of the Wisconsin Statutes.

Passage of the new law was a significant victory for homeschooling interests around the state. By transferring control over the process of home education from the DPI to parents, the law upheld the traditional role and authority of parents regarding the education of children. The legislation also severely damaged Constitutional arguments in favor of greater regulation. Article X Section 1 of the Wisconsin State Constitution provides, that "The supervision of public instruction shall be vested in a State Superintendent and such other officers as the Legislature shall direct." Because the legislation defines homeschooling as a private entity, many experts believe that DPI now has no legal standing or authority to regulate the practice. These developments sounded a strong vote of confidence for parents who undertook the education of their children at home, and in so doing, helped to make homeschooling a more attractive, safe and practical option for Wisconsin parents.

Homeschooling Comes of Age: The Development of An Effective Interest and Lobbying Group

While a variety of external and internal factors have contributed to the emergence of homeschooling in Wisconsin, the success of home education at the grass roots level and in the state legislature has also helped to significantly shape its development.

The movement in Wisconsin has done a good job of reaching out to parents and communicating the message of how homeschooling can help to meet the needs of parents and students. Two major homeschooling groups in

the state — Wisconsin Parents Association (WPA) and Christian Home Educators Association (CHEA) — do not encourage dependence on Washington or Madison, but rather encourage their members to actively safeguard their rights. The groups encourage the formation of support and resource networks. Conferences are also frequently held to address the varied needs of parents and students. Local resource groups have helped many homeschoolers overcome the problems of isolation and uncertainty and provide connection to the larger homeschooling community.

In addition to working effectively at the grass roots level, homeschoolers have also demonstrated varied political skills. When legislation giving DPI authority over home education was drafted into bill form in 1983, many educators and politicians thought passage was a certainty. The Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) reportedly boasted that it would bury homeschoolers in 1983. The bill was defeated. During the passage of key legislation in 1984, the movement proved to be very well organized. Leaders in the homeschooling movement garnered the support of key legislators and demonstrated political skills that easily outflanked the opposition.[20]

The reputation of homeschoolers for political activism continues to this day. It is not uncommon for legislators to cite the group as some of the most politically active constituents in their district. The Wisconsin Parents Association has a reputation among many Legislators for effectively mobilizing members to protect and safeguard the interests of its members. The defeat of numerous proposals to increase state regulation of homeschooling in recent years attests to this influence.[21]

TABLE1 HOME BASED ENROLLMENT IN WISCONSIN BY LEVEL AND TOTALS - 1985-1998

Level	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Pre-K	39	59	96	108	135	170	170	177	188	271	357	358	381	409
K	106	175	269	318	352	429	451	477	523	598	629	735	741	853
1	184	279	401	485	594	657	655	726	892	996	1020	1127	1237	1342
2	136	275	355	436	552	619	655	701	854	952	1024	1125	1244	1334
3	124	182	334	380	484	569	649	728	785	928	1009	1121	1200	1275
4	91	165	254	370	436	541	577	714	796	855	1028	1148	1222	1279
5	86	148	230	291	419	477	555	619	770	846	910	1084	1184	1266
6	77	139	194	244	333	427	503	568	699	870	908	1011	1138	1274
7	76	113	181	215	293	376	441	538	663	827	947	1112	1123	1290
8	56	100	138	210	278	313	368	470	611	751	967	1062	1161	1229
No Level	28	65	60	115	196	190	278	346	408	677	820	995	1109	1266
Primary Totals	**1003**	**1700**	**2512**	**3172**	**4072**	**4768**	**5302**	**6064**	**7189**	**8571**	**9619**	**10878**	**11740**	**12817**
9	60	104	121	170	237	334	365	499	615	799	1019	1215	1299	1466
10	27	[illegible]	97	138	207	303	378	466	610	795	1055	1309	1397	1604
11	15	33	[illegible]	78	145	282	336	415	549	719	920	1216	1279	1419
12	11	15	23	50	77	133	208	253	315	383	570	638	799	881
No Level	10	19	12	16	41	49	72	108	123	216	275	376	410	525
Secondary Totals	**123**	**241**	**309**	**452**	**707**	**1101**	**1359**	**1741**	**2212**	**2912**	**3839**	**4754**	**5184**	**5895**
Pre-K-12 Totals	***1126***	***1941***	***2821***	***3624***	***4779***	***5869***	***6661***	***7805***	***9401***	***11483***	***13458***	***15632***	***16924***	***18712***

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, September 1998.

Summary

What factors contributed to the recent rise of homeschooling in Wisconsin? Broad social and cultural factors and changing values contributed to a loss of confidence in public education. Stinging critiques of public education from voices on the left and the right helped to lay the philosophical groundwork for the movement. Passage of legislation giving parents — not the Department of Public Instruction — authority over homeschooling, brought the fledgling movement legitimacy and support and eliminated many of the obstacles to educating children at home. Equally important, the new legislation freed up home educators to actively participate in local and statewide efforts to strengthen the movement both at home and in Madison.

TABLE 2 HOME BASED ENROLLMENT IN WISCONSIN PERCENTAGE BY GRADE, ACADEMIC YEAR ENDING IN:

Level	1985	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998
Pre-K	3.5	3.0	3.4	3.0	2.8	2.9	2.6	2.3	2.0	2.4	2.7	2.3	2.3	2.2
K	9.4	9.0	9.5	8.8	7.4	7.3	6.8	6.1	5.6	5.2	4.7	4.7	4.4	4.6
1	16.3	14.4	14.2	13.4	12.4	11.2	9.8	9.3	9.5	8.7	7.6	7.2	7.3	7.2
2	12.1	14.2	12.6	12.0	11.6	10.5	9.8	9.0	9.1	8.3	7.6	7.2	7.4	7.1
3	11.0	9.4	11.8	10.5	10.1	9.7	9.7	9.3	8.4	8.1	7.5	7.2	7.1	6.8
4	8.1	8.5	9.0	10.2	9.1	9.2	8.7	9.1	8.5	7.4	7.6	7.3	7.2	6.8
5	7.6	7.6	8.2	8.0	8.8	8.1	8.3	7.9	8.2	7.4	6.8	6.9	7.0	6.8
6	6.8	7.2	6.9	6.7	7.0	7.3	7.6	7.3	7.4	7.6	6.7	6.5	6.7	6.8
7	6.7	5.8	6.4	5.9	6.1	6.4	6.6	6.9	7.1	7.2	7.0	7.1	6.6	6.9
8	5.0	5.2	4.9	5.8	5.8	5.3	5.5	6.0	6.5	6.5	7.2	6.8	6.9	6.6
No Level	2.5	3.3	2.1	3.2	4.1	3.2	4.2	4.4	4.3	5.9	6.1	6.4	6.6	6.8
Primary Total	89.1	87.6	89.0	87.5	85.2	81.2	79.6	77.7	76.5	74.6	71.5	69.6	69.4	68.5
9	5.3	5.4	4.3	4.7	5.0	5.7	5.5	6.4	6.5	7.0	7.6	7.8	7.7	7.8
10	2.4	3.6	3.4	3.8	4.3	5.2	5.7	6.0	6.5	6.9	7.8	8.4	8.3	8.6
11	1.3	1.7	2.0	2.2	3.0	4.8	5.0	5.3	5.8	6.3	6.8	7.8	7.6	7.6
12	1.0	.8	.8	1.4	1.6	2.3	3.1	3.2	3.4	3.3	4.2	4.1	4.7	4.7
No Level	.9	1.0	.4	.4	.9	.8	1.1	1.4	1.3	1.9	2.0	2.4	2.4	2.8
Secondary Total	10.9	12.4	11.0	12.5	14.8	18.8	20.4	22.3	23.5	25.4	28.5	30.4	30.6	31.5
All	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*	*100*

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Home-Based Enrollment Statistics, September 1998.

TABLE 3 HOME BASED ENROLLMENT IN THIRTY LARGEST SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN WISCONSIN - 1994-1998

School District	1993-94	Percent*	1994-95	Percent	1995-96	Percent	1996-97	Percent	1997-98	Percent
Milwaukee	764	0.80	861	0.88	969	0.98	1051	1.04	1150	1.14
Madison	176	0.72	201	0.81	224	0.89	249	0.99	275	1.09
Racine	228	1.02	258	1.15	308	1.38	357	1.61	383	1.74
Green Bay	206	1.09	232	1.20	258	1.31	269	1.36	327	1.64
Kenosha	151	0.86	220	1.21	276	1.47	282	1.48	314	1.61
Appleton	139	1.00	203	1.45	221	1.56	216	1.51	259	1.79
Waukesha	141	1.08	141	1.07	163	1.22	181	1.36	214	1.63
Eau Claire	154	1.35	184	1.60	202	1.73	220	1.88	262	2.28
Oshkosh	99	1.03	119	1.20	129	1.27	147	1.40	177	1.66
Sheboygan	200	1.97	221	2.13	165	1.60	180	1.76	214	2.10
Janesville	99	1.00	142	1.41	242	2.28	235	2.21	260	2.50
Wausau	93	1.05	123	1.37	125	1.37	151	1.62	149	1.59
West Allis	86	0.94	122	1.33	127	1.36	161	1.74	200	2.19
Stevens Point	115	1.36	135	1.57	141	1.65	122	1.43	130	1.56
La Crosse	90	1.11	87	1.05	91	1.11	102	1.28	113	1.42
Fond du Lac	73	0.97	103	1.37	144	1.91	157	2.09	155	2.08
Elmbrook	46	0.67	77	1.09	91	1.27	103	1.44	102	1.42
Wauwatosa	42	0.25	47	0.64	46	0.62	70	0.95	87	1.21
Beloit	48	1.39	108	1.52	138	1.90	168	2.38	198	2.87
West Bend	101	1.48	103	1.49	122	1.74	156	2.26	180	2.63
Neenah	25	0.55	73	1.12	83	1.27	93	1.42	103	1.57
Wisconsin Rapids	57	0.94	83	1.36	100	1.63	124	2.02	139	2.26
Manitowoc	32	0.60	28	0.51	61	1.09	63	1.11	76	1.32
Superior	27	0.46	25	0.44	47	0.82	67	1.18	90	1.61
Mukwonago	71	1.42	81	1.60	87	1.70	103	2.04	106	2.09
D.C. Everest	52	1.09	59	1.21	66	1.35	75	1.54	88	1.80
Midd-C. P.	40	0.89	53	1.18	64	1.39	62	1.31	60	1.23
Oak Creek/Franklin	29	0.67	33	0.76	35	0.76	36	0.77	44	0.92
New Berlin	36	0.78	38	0.81	51	1.07	66	1.36	62	1.31
Sun Prairie	37	1.23	43	0.99	42	0.95	40	0.90	52	1.13

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Home-Based Enrollment Data by School District, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998.

* - Percent refers to Percent of District Enrollment

The Face of Homeschooling in Wisconsin

The previous discussion asserts that a combination of factors contributed to the emergence of homeschooling in Wisconsin. This section addresses two questions that arise from the previous discussion:

1. Who homeschools in Wisconsin?
2. What characteristics define the families and students?

Our attention now turns to addressing these concerns.

Recent Trendlines

Though enrollments have risen significantly in the past fifteen years, the total number of home educated students still pale in comparison to all students. Department of Public Instruction statistics indicate homeschooled students now comprise 1.79 percent of all students, up from .12 of one percent in 1985, and nearly double the .95 percent figure of 1993.[22] When compared with other populations however, the growth in home education is impressive. Over the period, 1985-98, enrollment in home-based education programs increased 1,562 percent. Public school enrollment over the same period experienced a 14.0 percent increase, while enrollment in private schools actually declined 4.1 percent, from 153,661 to 147,344.[23]

Table 1 on page 9 and Table 2 on page 10 details some of this growth. Table 1 provides home-based enroll-

Table 4 Home Based Enrollment in Selected Small School Districts in Wisconsin - 1994-1998

School District	1993-94	Percent*	1994-95	Percent	1995-96	Percent	1996-97	Percent	1997-98	Percent
Antigo	101	3.10	140	4.37	178	5.61	156	4.92	153	4.90
Belleville	3	0.42	4	0.56	5	0.64	5	0.62	0	0.00
Campbelsport	24	1.48	34	2.05	52	3.02	62	3.58	59	3.58
Crandon	11	1.06	18	1.73	11	1.00	12	1.07	10	0.87
Ft. Atkinson	25	0.96	37	1.44	42	1.58	42	1.60	58	2.25
Hayward	59	3.01	70	3.46	66	3.27	80	3.93	80	3.88
Holmen	25	1.00	35	1.40	41	1.53	34	1.22	44	1.55
Iola-Scandinavia	28	3.75	22	2.88	18	2.28	18	2.37	16	2.06
Little Chute	3	0.23	6	0.46	20	1.52	30	2.18	31	2.28
Onalaska	23	0.89	34	1.29	35	1.28	24	0.87	37	1.35
Oregon	25	0.85	41	1.34	34	1.06	34	1.06	41	1.26
Phelps	4	1.85	4	1.87	4	1.86	5	2.26	6	2.78
Rhinelander	119	3.53	139	4.06	141	4.10	137	3.94	154	4.45
Sparta	25	0.93	29	1.06	40	1.43	55	1.95	80	2.78
Union Grove	11	1.91	9	1.54	15	2.60	17	3.04	23	3.966

Source: Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, Home-Based Enrollment Data by School District, 1994, 1995, 1996, 1997 and 1998.

* - Percent refers to Percent of District Enrollment

ment by grade and year. Table 2 categorizes homeschooling enrollments and percentages by grade over time. These trendlines reveal several things. First, the movement is gaining strength in numbers and maturing. Over the last three years, the home education population has grown at an average annual rate of 11.6 percent. That is a decline from the robust 28, 30 and 23 percent increases of the mid and late 1980s, but is still a healthy figure. Table 1 also reveals that over time the total number of home-based education program students in all grades has increased. Only three times in the past fifteen years has a grade level failed to register an increase in enrollment over the previous year.

What does this mean? It seems to imply parents are homeschooling longer. With more resources and networks of homeschoolers across the state and nation, parents feel more comfortable with the process, and are homeschooling not only in the early grades, but now into the middle and upper grades. Since the early nineties, the K-8 homeschooling population has become more evenly distributed among grade levels. The change in trendlines in Table 2 is worth noting. In 1984-85, K-8 homeschooling enrollment was 89.1 percent of total enrollment. In 1997-98, the same figures comprised only 68.5 percent of all enrollment. That year, 5,895 students — almost a third of the state's entire homeschool population — were registered in levels 9-12, a dramatic change from earlier years. Clearly, most parents no longer regard home education as an option for merely the lower elementary grades.

Where Do Homeschoolers Live?

Historically, homeschooling in Wisconsin has been an option of choice for those with rural or suburban lifestyles. Enrollments in urban areas — although gaining as of late — have lagged as a proportion of the total population. Indeed, pooling the homeschool enrollments of the fifteen largest school districts in the state — approximately 30 percent of total student enrollment — yields only 4,244 — or 22 percent — of the approximately 18,700 home-educated students statewide.[24] Such findings may merely underscore that homeschooling is simply a more attractive option for those with rural lifestyles. However, it may also reflect the lack of viable alternative educational opportunities in rural areas. Certainly for some, the proximity of private and parochial schools in many urban areas provide an option for many families who might otherwise homeschool.

TABLE 5 SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH THE LARGEST HOMESCHOOLING ENROLLMENT BY RANK ACADEMIC YEAR 1997-98

School District	Number of Homeschooled Students	Percentage of Students in District
Milwaukee	1,150	1.14
Racine	383	1.74
Green Bay Area	327	1.64
Kenosha	314	1.61
Madison Metro	275	1.09
Eau Claire Area	262	2.28
Janesville	260	2.50
Appleton Area	259	1.79
Sheboygan	214	2.10
Waukesha	214	1.63

Large Districts

Over the past five years, homeschooling enrollments in the state's fifteen largest districts experienced significant growth (See Table 3). On average, enrollments increased 68 percent over the period 1994-98. Increases varied in size from 162 percent in Janesville and 132 percent in West Allis, to only 7 percent in Sheboygan. Milwaukee, the state's largest district, experienced a fifty percent increase in homeschooling activity, with enrollment increasing from 764 in 1994, to 1,150 in 1998. A cursory review of all large districts for the past five years reveals most districts experienced slight to steady increases.[25]

Middle Sized Districts

The bottom fifteen districts in Table 3 represent home-based education enrollment in fifteen medium-sized districts in Wisconsin. While the combined enrollment of these fifteen districts yields only 8 percent of total enrollments, over the past five years these districts experienced significantly larger increases in home education enrollments. Enrollments in medium-sized districts grew at an average of 117 percent. Two districts, Beloit and Neenah, experienced increases of 312 percent over the period, with enrollments during the period jumping from 48 to 198 and

TABLE 6 SCHOOL DISTRICTS WITH THE LARGEST PERCENTAGE OF HOMESCHOOLING STUDENTS ACADEMIC YEAR 1997-98

School District	Number of Homeschooled Students	Percentage of District Students
Beecher Dunbar-Pembine	77	22.08
South Shore	41	12.89
Dover	8	10.13
Wausaukee	75	9.51
Neosho J3	23	9.31
Northwood	35	8.97
Wonewoc-Union Center	39	8.46
Flambeau	59	8.44
White Lake	24	7.95
Winter	34	7.49

25 to 103 students, respectively. Superior's 233 percent increase is also worth noting. For the most part, home-based enrollment in middle-sized districts exhibited steady increases. Reasons for the dramatic increases in enrollments in cities are hard to assess. Higher increases likely derive from a combination of smaller base populations and strong local factors. Some argue that these numbers lack significance, since the absolute numbers still are not large, nor are the percentages relative to the total school age population. Still over 1,400 students were homeschooled in these districts in 1997-98, and by all accounts, enrollment in homeschooling is likely to increase in the future. Those who want to imply that homeschooling's disbursed population renders it relatively unimportant fail to understand the magnitude of the total numbers.

Selected Small Districts

Table 4 provides home-based enrollment figures for selected small and primarily rural districts in Wisconsin. Districts were chosen on the basis of their geographical distribution. Selected districts were intended as a sample of small districts across the state. The largest percentage of homeschooling enrollments came from medium or small districts — approximately 71 percent of total enrollment. Data reveal enrollment in homeschooling for selected, small, rural districts expanded an average of 132 percent for the period 1994-1998.[26] Increases ranged from a whopping 933 percent increase in Little Chute, to a 9 percent decline in enrollment in Crandon. Eliminating Little Chute from consideration — which some would argue is statistically justified — reduces the average percentage increase over the period to about 71 percent, still a healthy figure.

What Do the Data Mean?

A cursory review of enrollment data yields several conclusions. While most homeschoolers still reside in medium or small districts, in recent years larger districts have experienced significant gains in home education enrollments. Homeschooling is beginning to emerge as a greater presence in larger districts and urban areas around the state. Over the past five years, medium-sized districts have exhibited the largest percentage gains in enrollment. The data confirm what many have thought for some time: gains in enrollment have been consistent over time and widespread throughout the state.

As with many issues, finding the real impact of these trends depends on whom you ask. While the increase in the homeschooling population does not threaten public schools, administrators in many districts are concerned about the economic impact of home education. In 1996-97 complete, annual, school costs per pupil in the state were $7608.[27] The state share of per pupil costs was approximately 66 percent. In 1997-98 the state provided $4,940 in support per FTE student.[28] Thus every child who leaves the public schools takes from the schools nearly $5,000 in state support. The vast majority of homeschool students are located in small and middle-sized school districts. Decisions by parents to remove children from school can have a significant financial impact on these districts. While this is true, middle and smaller-sized districts on average spend less than the state average and have smaller enrollments, which should lead to a reduction in overall costs. It is also true that many of these districts also receive higher levels of state aid, because of lower equalized valuations and the lower per member shared costs by the district. Thus, changes in enrollment in some small districts can still have significant impact on district finances.

The argument articulating the negative economic effects of home education rings hollow with most home educators. On the contrary, homeschoolers contend they often save districts money by reducing enrollment and cutting other costs. "Why should we pay for a system that we don't even use?," is a common complaint among homeschooling parents. Homeschoolers assert enrollment gains merely reflect widespread dissatisfaction with the current educational system and the growing appeal of homeschooling as an educational alternative. In recent years such sentiments have prompted many home educators to join with others in support of alternative financing initiatives such as school choice, charter schools, and tax credits for those who educate their children in private, church or homeschools.

The Face of Homeschooling in Wisconsin

Who homeschools in Wisconsin? What characteristics define homeschoolers in Wisconsin? Fears about overzealous government regulators and a strong desire to be left alone have made it difficult to obtain data to answer these questions. Nevertheless, a recent study, *Strengths of Their Own*, by Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute (1997) might provide some information in this area.[29] The study analyzed the responses of 1,657 homeschooling families in various states to questions submitted in 1994. Forty-seven of those families lived in Wisconsin. The goal of the study "...was to examine the academic achievement and social activities of home educated students and the basic demographics of their families to assess the relationship between student achievement and selected student and family variables, and to describe and explore certain longitudinal changes among home-educated students and their families."[30] The study also sought to provide a comparison over time of changes within homeschooling families. Two hundred seventy-five of the 1,657 families participating in the 1994 study also participated in Ray's 1990 national study, *A Nationwide Study of Home Education: Family Characteristics, Legal Matters and Student Achievement*.[31]

Data provided by the 47 Wisconsin families included in the study were acquired from Brian Ray at the National Home Education Research Institute and analyzed. Before providing results of our brief analysis, several caveats are in order regarding how the findings are to be interpreted. As with any study, certain limitations apply. First, responses were culled mostly from volunteers, most of whom were affiliated with the conservative and evangelical factions of the home education movement. Second, the use of voluntary responses may raise some methodological concerns. Volunteers tend to be better educated and have higher social class.[32] The presence of these limitations does not negate the value of this research. A review of local and statewide homeschooling groups and conference materials makes one readily aware of the high rate of participation of Evangelical Christians in the homeschooling movement in Wisconsin. These considerations aside, the research can still provide a baseline from which to conduct further research and provide outlines of demographic, educational, and social characteristics of homeschooling families in the state.

What follows is a summary of an analysis of the Wisconsin families included in the national study. Results are only reported for categories receiving sufficient responses. Results are reported as a percentage of respondents.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Characteristics of Forty Seven Homeschooling Families in Wisconsin — 1994

Family Characteristics

Educational Background of Parents: Average years of Formal Schooling

Males

- 14.5 years
- 42% have Bachelors degree or further graduate or professional education
- 27.6% have only high school education

Females

- 14.5 years
- 33% have Bachelors degree
- 57.6% have high school diploma or some college

Racial Background

Fathers

- 94% White
- 4% Hispanic
- 2% Asian

Mothers

- 100% White

Marital Status

- Family units all married couples, but one
- One single mother

Family Size

- Average family: 3.6 children
- 67% of respondents had between 2-4 children

Religious Preference

Women

- 79% Protestant designations
- 89% of Women describe selves as "Born Again" Christians
- 40% classified as "Independent Fundamental/Evangelical"
- 6% Roman Catholic
- 15% "Other Religious Designation"

Male

- 79% classified within Protestant denominations
- 87% of Men describe selves as "Born Again" Christians
- 40% classified as "Independent Fundamental/Evangelical"
- 6% Roman Catholic

Family Economic Characteristics

Gross Family Income

- Median Family income $36,500 (1994 Earnings)
- Range from $10,000 to $137,000
- 32% of families $30,000 or less
- 34% of families between $30,000-$50,000

Primary Occupation of Fathers

- 21%: professional designation; doctors, lawyers, engineers, registered nursing. Equally divided between lower and higher professions
- 15%: technical, computer programmer or medical or dental technician
- 15%: office or sales manager or administrative
- 10%: tradesperson, plumber, baker, carpenter
- 10%: owner of small business
- Remainder divided among service workers, sales, machinery operators, and other occupations

Primary Occupation of Mothers

- 91% of respondents listed homemaker or "Home Educator"
- 6% of respondents listed various other occupations such as professional, service worker, or tradesperson as primary occupation
- 92% of mothers do not work outside the home
- Of those employed outside home, on average worked 7 hours per week

Where Do Homeschoolers Live?

- 18% Urban or Central City
- 31% Suburban Areas
- 51% in Rural, not suburban areas

Racial Characteristics of Children

- 96% White Background
- 2% Hispanic
- 2% "Other"

Homeschooling in Practice: Characteristics of Families

Satisfied Statutory Requirements for homeschooling in Wisconsin?

- 91% of respondents yes
- 2% describe as "underground"
- 7% No response

Who Teaches Kids?

Females

- 26% respond "100% of teaching"
- 74% responded "90% or more of teaching"

Males

- 34% of males list involvement with 10% of teaching
- 20% respond between 1-5% of teaching
- 25% "involved with no teaching at all"
- Remaining 20% list varying percentages of between 12-40% involvement

Teacher Certification?

Males

- 19% are certified
- Of those certified, only 11% are currently certified

Women

- 2% of women state certified
- None current and none certified within state of residence

Homeschooling Habits

- 55% of respondents "read the newspaper regularly"
- 94% of families receive magazines regularly
- 96% are on mailing or membership list of homeschooling organizations at the local, state, or national levels
- 81% of respondents subscribe to home education periodicals
- 81% own computer
- Average homeschooling family in Wisconsin visits a library — public, church, or private —3.1 visits per month

Money Spent on Homeschooling

- $542 average family expenditures spent per child per year on homeschooling expenses (tuition, textbooks, field trips, special resources)
- $300 median family expenditures spent per child per year on homeschooling expenses (tuition, textbooks, field trips, special resources)
- 57% of respondents spent between $200 and $500 annually
- 28% spent over $500
- Range from $30 to $3500 Most between $200-$500 range

Curriculum

- 100% of respondents choose "parent designed curriculum hand-picked by parents" (Significant nonrespondents for question)

Method of Instruction

- 34% employ traditional textbooks and assignments
- 27% use "eclectic" or directed by parents
- 13% use Advanced Training Institute (ATI), a private curriculum
- 10% use the unit study method
- 6% use unschooling, where curriculum is directed by child's choices and desires
- 3% use work texts
- 7% describe as "other"

Degree of Homeschooling Structure: Scale 1 to 7, very unstructured to very structured

- Respondents average score 4.53
- 83% of respondents 4 or above
- 56% were either 5 or 6

Average hours per day that child is engaged in structured learning

- 4.1 hours per day
- 47% had 5 or more hours per day

Outside Activities of Homeschoolers

Amount of contact per week, by homeschooling children with adults outside of family

- 10 hours per week, on average
- 37% between 10 and 15 hours per week
- 75% 10 or less hours

Amount of contact per week by homeschooling children with children outside the family

- Nine hours per week, on average

Church Attendance

- 80% of children attend church worship services between 4 and 7 times per month
- 13% attend between 1 and 3 times
- 7% do not attend any worship services per month

Sunday School Attendance

- 61% of homeschoolers attend Sunday school, 4-7 times a month
- 20% attend 1-3 times per month
- 11% never attend

Attend a Church Youth Group?

- 40% of homeschoolers attend church youth group between 2-7 times a month
- 15% attend once a month
- 25% never attend
- 20% have no opportunity to attend

Odds and Ends

- 65% of respondents participated in some form of organized sports, volunteerism, music classes, or field trips
- 62% of respondents use a computer for educational purposes
- 12% of homeschooling children have received special assistance for special needs problems (e.g. hearing, visual, speech, etc.) in past year

Findings

What do the data reveal? The data reflect the strong conservative, religious flavor of homeschooling and the heavy emphasis on traditional or conservative educational methods. The data also reveal homeschooling to be a largely middle class endeavor, led mostly by mothers. One interesting finding, however, is that, contrary to many popular conceptions, homeschooling is highly social and most of the instruction is highly structured. Most families are affiliated with a local, state, or national homeschooling organizations; most children frequent the library, make field trips, and participate in a variety of club sports, music activities, or volunteering opportunities — at rates frequently equal to or above their private and public school counterparts.

Certainly research that includes data from a larger sample of families would help strengthen these findings. Nevertheless, the current sample reflects the strong religious element of homeschooling in Wisconsin. Furthermore, research has shown that in many cases average income levels and the range of income distributions for homeschoolers approximates those of the general population.[33] That average income and the range of distribution approximates that of the overall population in Wisconsin, supports the claim that the sample may be representative of the home education population in Wisconsin. Doubtless, further research is needed. However, this work can serve as a starting point for assessing some of the major characteristics of homeschooling families in Wisconsin.

The Face of the Movement

Local Homeschooling Groups

One important finding that surfaces in most surveys or studies on homeschooling is that a high percentage of home educators are actively involved with local and state organizations. Ninety-six percent of Wisconsin respondents said they were on the mailing list of local state or national homeschooling organizations.[34]

Influential statewide home education groups such as the Wisconsin Parents Association and Christian Home Educators Association recognize the importance of these groups and actively encourage membership and participation. Such organizations seek to meet needs and communicate concerns. Page through any homeschooling magazine or newsletter and you will likely find listings of local or state homeschooling groups. Conferences such as those put on by the Wisconsin Parents Association and Wisconsin Christian Home Educators Association frequently have seminars on starting and leading home education groups.

Because they are often informal gatherings, no one knows the exact number of homeschooling groups statewide. Accurate estimates are difficult to compile. Nevertheless, estimates ranging between 50-100 groups, statewide, are considered ballpark assessments by those close to the movement.[35] Such groups can be as small as four and as large as fifty. Most are defined along the following three criteria: Religion (Christian or secular), Educational philosophy (traditional or alternative), and Focus (parent or student, academics or social).

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

There is no ready-made formula for a successful homeschooling group. No two groups are alike, but all seek to serve the needs of members. Some groups may seek to provide parents a forum for asking questions and sharing concerns about home education. Others try to provide specialized classes or training for students in a particular area such as music or science. Some simply function as an opportunity to allow students to get together with other home educated students.

Several of the larger and more active homeschooling groups are clustered in the Milwaukee, Madison, and Fox River Valley areas. Each group is different in orientation and outlook. One of the oldest homeschooling groups in the State is HOME (Home Oriented Meaningful Education). Alison McKee of Madison started the group out of her home in 1980. HOME was created with the notion that the members would formulate the flavor of the group. McKee recounts that in the beginning she wanted "to surround myself with parents who were venturing through the uncharted waters of unschooling and might therefore be able to offer me some support along the way."[36] Over the past fifteen years, HOME has had its strong and weak points. Families have filtered through and each family contributed what they could. McKee, still active in HOME, has learned much from HOME. The organization still tries to recognize the diversity within the movement and keep an outward focus. McKee says "homeschoolers are a divergent and independent group of individuals and our individuality and divergence makes us an asset to the communities we live in."[37]

Statewide Organizations

In addition to small groups, many home educators in Wisconsin actively participate in statewide homeschooling organizations. Two of the most prominent and visible of these organizations are the Wisconsin Parents Association (WPA) and Christian Home Educators Association (CHEA). WPA, the oldest and largest organization of its kind in the state was founded in 1984 to encourage and support homeschooling in Wisconsin. A grass roots organization, WPA carries out these tasks by educating members about homeschooling issues, testifying for and against legislation, and providing resources to help meet the practical needs of its members. The organization also publishes a newsletter and each spring sponsors a large and well-respected annual homeschooling conference.

Larry Kaseman leads WPA. Kaseman is a nationally known home education advocate and is well known in the Legislature and educational circles for his unschooling views and his unwavering opposition to state regulation of homeschooling. He is regarded by friend and foe as a tireless, passionate, and uncompromising advocate of homeschooling in Wisconsin.

Success has followed many of WPA's efforts. In 1983 and 1984, WPA leadership was instrumental in drafting and mobilizing legislative and public support for Wisconsin's homeschooling law. To the credit of WPA and its members, the law has remained largely unchanged since then. In recent years however, the organization has been faced with a number of new challenges. As the movement has grown, homeschoolers have also diversified. The annual home education conference at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point, one of the largest in the midwest, attracts close to 1,000 attendees and 70 homeschooling vendors reflects this growing diversity. Visitors can purchase a variety of traditional and alternative curricula, visit with traditional Amish families, or discuss the latest in educational software with representatives from large computer companies. While WPA says that it openly welcomes the diversity, many of the newer homeschoolers advocate greater interaction with schools and favor governmental support — positions that run counter to long-held WPA views. How the organization addresses the challenge of growing diversity within the homeschooling ranks will go a long way in deciding whether the organization remains an effective force in defending the rights and freedoms of home educators in Wisconsin.

The Wisconsin Chapter of the Christian Home Educators Association (CHEA) is another prominent statewide homeschooling organization. Based in Racine, CHEA was started in 1990 by Al and Jan Gnacinski. The Gnacinskis "realized there was a real need among Christian homeschoolers for a statewide support group that could provide homeschoolers with things they were not getting elsewhere."[38] CHEA has a strong conservative, Christian flavor. The organization prominently displays its statement of faith on brochures and publications and its leadership is composed of born-again Christians. CHEA is classified as a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. However, unlike WPA, CHEA does not lobby the Legislature on policy issues.

CHEA has a membership of about 700 parents. The organization publishes a newsletter five times a year with original and reprinted articles on Christian home education. Besides the articles, listings of Christian support groups throughout the state are also included. The group's main events of the year are two family homeschooling conferences in the Milwaukee area, one in spring and one in fall. The conferences provide practical help for improved teaching and serve as an opportunity to encourage homeschooling parents. This year's Spring conference attracted close to 1,500 attendees.[39]

Summary

Who homeschools in Wisconsin? Statistics, surveys, and interviews with movement leaders help us to sketch a profile of a typical homeschooler. Enrollment trends reveal the homeschooling population has grown steadily at all levels and in all regions of the state. Replies from homeschooling families in Wisconsin to a national survey reveal most families are: religious, led by mothers, have average family incomes, and have children actively involved with extracurricular activities. The high participation levels of homeschooling families in local and statewide home education groups is also notable and helpful in understanding the success home educators have enjoyed as a movement.

Current Concerns and Is Wisconsin's Homeschooling Law Working?

Current Concerns

Observers of the education landscape readily note that solutions to many of the problems in education today emanate from two opposing philosophies. James Cibulka formerly of the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and now of the University of Maryland said as much when he noted:

> At one side, in the name of higher educational standards, state regulation has increased dramatically in many states, and the push for regulation has imposed uniform personnel, program and testing requirements on local school districts. At the other side, in response to public demand, states have increased choices available to families for selecting a school. Homeschooling represents the second of these policy developments.[40]

Wisconsin's homeschooling law gives parents another choice in how children should be educated. The growth in homeschooling has given the movement more visibility, but also brought greater scrutiny. These developments have prompted others to ask: Is Wisconsin's homeschooling law working? Is the law striking the proper balance between the rights of parents and the responsibilities of the state in ensuring an educated citizenry?

Several current issues involving home education reflect the questions and concerns that define this debate. These issues include Shared Services, Academic Testing Requirements, and the impact of home education on college campuses. This report now turns to a brief discussion of concerns in each of these areas.

Shared Services

"In school districts across the country a growing number of the exploding population of homeschoolers would like to participate in at least some activities at traditional schools. Some want scholastic benefits, others want extracurricular benefits for social reasons or to burnish their record for college applications." So read *US News and World Report's* description of an emerging trend in homeschooling: greater access to courses and services currently available in the public schools.[41]

In response to these sentiments, last year the Wisconsin legislature passed Section 118.145 of the Wisconsin Statutes. The new law requires a school district — space permitting — to allow a private school or home-based education student to enroll in up to two courses per semester in the high school in which the student is a resident. To qualify, students must be residents of the district and must satisfy district high school admission standards. The legislation allows each local school board to decide if other services and fees such as transportation assistance and extracurricular activities — band, clubs, etc. — will be available for private and home-based students enrolled in the part-time attendance option program.[42]

Shared services legislation has received mixed reviews from educators and homeschoolers. Furthermore, those commenting on the legislation have been careful to distinguish between principle and practice. Informal discussions with superintendents around the state reveal some welcome the changes, but most are cautious about how the program is administered.[43]

Under the legislation, school districts can count on a full-time equivalency basis, private school or home-based education students in the calculation of equalization aid. The district counts each private school or home-based education student for no more than two high school courses per semester. The legislation does not allow districts to count private or home-based education students in the calculation of its revenue limit.

In commenting on these provisions, Russ Allen of the Wisconsin Education Association Council (WEAC) notes, "This [e.g., the part-time attendance option] is fine with WEAC. WEAC is committed to the education of all

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

students and we will always welcome the participation of these students in the public schools. However, there is a dilemma related to revenue controls. If these students are not part of the student count for funding purposes, schools may find it more and more difficult to provide quality instruction for those who attend public schools full-time. As a result, classes may become larger, costs may rise, additional staff may be needed."[44]

While many welcome the new opportunities as a sign of greater cooperation between homeschoolers and educators, others are lukewarm in their assessment. Opponents of home education are angered by passage of the part-time attendance option. They fault homeschoolers for damning public schools altogether and now wanting to take advantage of only that part of public education that looks attractive. They assert schools do not have the responsibility to provide for those outside the system. And they also fear that opening the school doors to homeschoolers and private school students will likely foreclose other academic and extracurricular opportunities for traditional students and lead to increased costs.

Participation in interscholastic athletics is one area where the impact of these new regulations is felt. Currently, while DPI regulations would allow homeschooled students to participate in interscholastic athletic programs, WIAA rules preclude the participation of home-educated students. WIAA rules provide that students in private and parochial schools can play sports in public schools, if they are academically eligible and receive formal school approval to participate. Because the WIAA does not consider homeschooling to be synonymous with a private school, home-educated students are not allowed to participate in interscholastic competition.[45] Legislation to allow homeschoolers to participate in WIAA athletic programs has been introduced in the Assembly.

Somewhat surprisingly, homeschoolers also have mixed feelings about shared services legislation. Yes, many are thankful for the new opportunities the legislation opens up and that it puts them on equal footing with other taxpayers. Nevertheless, many wonder if program requirements impose too high a cost on the freedom and control they have over their child's education. The current legislation requires home educated students to meet normal admission requirements of the schools where they wish to take classes. However, since school districts frequently require homeschoolers to comply with formal reentry requirements, home educators contend the policy is discriminatory. They ask, "If you move to a new school from an old school, students would not be asked similar questions. Why should homeschoolers?" The Wisconsin Parents Association has also weighed in heavily on this debate. According to WPA, "There is no concrete evidence, that such discrimination against homeschoolers is necessary. Thousands of homeschoolers have entered or re-entered conventional schools without problems. Moreover, studies have shown that homeschoolers consistently perform at the same or higher level than their conventionally-schooled age peers."[46]

Home educators feel uneasy about submitting their work for review and approval by public school officials. They believe officials charged with reviewing their work have little knowledge of what it is like to educate children at home. Furthermore, since many educators already have a negative opinion of homeschooling, they doubt they will be able to receive a fair and objective evaluation.

In summary, the shared services law of 1998 provides homeschoolers access to classes and services in many public schools. The legislation has stirred up an array of concerns and questions on both sides of this issue: Can schools accommodate homeschooling students without compromising their commitment to enrolled students? Can school districts develop requirements that are fair to homeschooling students and yet protect the rights of all students? Are the benefits of shared services for homeschoolers sufficient to account for a loss of authority and control of the curriculum? How the public responds to these concerns will go a long way in assessing the impacts of this legislation on homeschooling in Wisconsin.

Academic Testing

In recent years, student testing has become a favorite tool for those seeking greater accountability through top-down reform efforts. The articulation of model academic standards, educational goals and outcomes has pushed testing to the front of the reform agenda in Wisconsin. These initiatives have led to the development of proficiency score standards in six different subject areas as well as the creation of the Wisconsin Student Assessment System. Commenting on these developments, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, John Benson said, "Accountability is a political reality. Society has a right to know what is going on in the classroom. People have invested too much money — and the stakes are too high — for them to be left in the dark....These tests were designed to identify students' strengths and weaknesses and should be used to help those students reach a higher level of knowledge."[47]

Currently, Wisconsin administers student tests in the fourth, eighth, and tenth grade as a means of providing students and schools with progress reports. However, several changes are in store in the coming years. Wisconsin law states that beginning in the 2002-03 school year, high school seniors will have to pass a graduation test as a

requirement for receiving a high school diploma. In addition, beginning the same year, fourth and eighth graders who fail these standardized tests will not be promoted to the next level. The test may be the only criteria used to make this decision.

While exempt from current testing provisions, home educators are strongly opposed to efforts to subject the group to the state's academic testing requirements. Homeschoolers assert the tests are biased and unable to measure a variety of experiences and important intangibles like creativity and resourcefulness. Furthermore, standardized tests give bureaucrats the ability to control what is taught, how, and when. Reliance on test scores gives the educational system authority in determining what opportunities are available to students. The imposition of strong testing requirements essentially results in a transfer of power over the educational process from parents to schools and the bureaucracy.

Homeschoolers believe such views run counter to their deepest held beliefs. Testing creates a right/wrong, linear view of education that while it may apply to some, does not accurately represent the uncertainty of many endeavors connected with the educational process. Worst of all, testing incorrectly assumes that all students are alike; that students should proceed lock, stock and barrel through grades 1-2-3 learning a-b-c. The notion that students should all learn the same content at the same time, strikes at the very heart of home education. The attraction of homeschooling for many is the ability to teach in a way that children could best learn by finding a pace and technique that suits their needs. Many home educators contend standardized testing requirements eliminate this flexibility and create a one-size-fits-all view toward education.

Yes, home educators have succeeded in winning exemptions from state testing requirements. Still, many questions remain unanswered: If testing requirements for homeschoolers are passed, homeschoolers wonder what will happen to those children who do poorly? Will home educators gain assurances that those who perform poorly will be treated the same way as those from public schools? Will such children be forced to reenter schools? Who will decide? Ironically, one wonders if the desire to access greater public services and benefits on the part of many homeschoolers, has jump-started efforts to bring greater regulation to homeschooling. Only time will tell.

Homeschooling and College

As the number of homeschooled students has increased in recent years, educators and policymakers have wondered how the growth of home education might affect colleges and universities in the state. Over the past five years, 3,271 homeschooled students have been classified as Grade 12 students — 881 in 1997-98 alone. If present trends continue, most educational institutions can expect significant increases in admission applications from homeschooled students over the next few years. These realities signify a need to ask the question: How is homeschooling impacting colleges and universities around the state?

Homeschooled students seeking admission to any of the state's private or public institutions of higher education will encounter almost as many policies as there are schools. Research indicates that smaller institutions traditionally have done a better job of responding to homeschoolers with higher education aspirations. However, in recent years larger institutions have also learned to accommodate home educated students. The thirteen campus University of Wisconsin System, the largest educational institution in the state, has no fixed policy on the admission of homeschooled students. Decisions are made on a campus-by-campus basis. Some institutions treat the application

TABLE 7 UW SYSTEM NEW FRESHMAN REPORTED AS HOMESCHOOLED

	Fall 1996	Fall 1997	Fall 1998
UW-Green Bay	2	-	4
UW-La Crosse	-	1	-
UW-Madison	-	1	1
UW-Milwaukee	3	2	3
UW-Oshkosh	-	2	1
UW-Parkside	1	3	1
UW-Platteville	-	-	1
UW-Stevens Point	-	3	4
UW-Whitewater	2	6	2
UW-Colleges	11	11	15
Totals	***19***	***29***	***32***

Source: University of Wisconsin System: Office of Policy Analysis and Research, May, 1999.

process very similarly to the application process for regular students, while others try to be more sensitive to the background and special circumstances that usually accompany homeschooling experiences.

How are admission decisions made on a typical campus? "Its difficult to generalize about the admissions process because they come to us with such a wide variety of records — and this is where we start" says Pam Harvey-Jacobs, Associate Director of Admissions at the University of Wisconsin-Green Bay, a campus with a reputation for being friendly toward homeschoolers. Harvey-Jacobs continued:

> Some students have very precise records that break their course work into traditional classes and credits; other students have more of a narrative summary of the work they have done. Our first step is to try to determine the type of course work that a student has done ...which subjects they have studied and to what extent. If there is any way to tell what the student's mastery of the subject is, we look at that. In addition, standardized test scores are usually utilized so we can gauge the student's performance in relation to a larger group of college bound students. If the ACT is not available, we have an admissions test that is offered on campus. [Admissions] decisions regarding homeschooled students are made by the Director or Associate Director.

Applicants at UW-Madison and UW-Milwaukee — two of the larger educational institutions in the state — can expect the application process to be similar to that for traditionally educated students. Janet LaFontese, Admissions Examiner for UW-Milwaukee, says the admissions process for homeschoolers differs only in that the high school and or/grade point averages are not usually available as they are for standard high school graduates. As such, there will be a heavier emphasis on SAT or ACT scores.

Despite these concerns, admissions officers say parents and students have been basically satisfied with the admissions processes of most schools. No, the process is not perfect. Many home educated students fear the current process puts too much authority in the hands of a few people without the benefit of written guidelines and requirements. That requirements for homeschoolers seem to be interpreted differently at La Crosse or Eau Claire is also troubling. Nevertheless, LaFontese and Harvey-Jacobs believe homeschoolers are well aware that their records are different, that test scores will likely play a larger role, and the burden of proof is on them to demonstrate their ability to do college work.

Does homeschooling equip students to function effectively in colleges and universities?

Parents and policymakers have the right to ask: Is homeschooling working? Does homeschooling equip students to function effectively in colleges and universities? Unfortunately this question is difficult to answer. Despite the growing numbers of homeschooled students around the state, they are not enrolling in local colleges or universities at rates their numbers would suggest. Over the past five years UW-Milwaukee says it has reviewed about 20 applications for admission from home-educated students, an average of about 3-5 per year. UW-Madison officials estimate admission applications from homeschoolers have increased slightly from about 3-5 in the mid-1990s to 5-8 a year the last two years.[48] The numbers of homeschooled students seeking admission at private colleges are not much different.[49] Table 7 provides information on the number of homeschooled applicants admitted to UW-System institutions from 1996-1998.

Considering the steady growth in homeschooling enrollments, most observers find the admissions numbers listed in the Table 7 to be much lower than expected. Several factors might help to account for the data. First, the UW System Office of Policy Analysis and Research says the admission numbers may appear low because they do not include transfer students from other campuses. Often times, transfers can account for up to 25-30 percent of new freshmen.[50] Alison McKee a fifteen year veteran of homeschooling and one who has seen many homeschoolers believes that the UW explanation may be a plausible theory. McKee says, "Most homeschoolers have a normal pattern of entering college early or late. Frequently many take classes at colleges while still in high school or they may decide to take classes after high school at a local community college before formally enrolling in college."[51] Tom Reason, Admissions officer at UW-Madison believes the data may be accurate, but for another reason. He contends that homeschoolers may choose to stay away from public colleges and universities for the very same reasons that kept them away from public grade schools and high schools.[52]

It may be contested that the data are simply inaccurate. Homeschooled students are admitted to college at a rate equal to or a little better than traditional students. Furthermore, even though there is no data to support it, most admission officials also believe home educated students perform as well, if not better, than traditional students. These factors would certainly raise questions about the UW System numbers. That homeschool admissions to private colleges are not much different than UW system admissions raises still further concerns. If the data is accurate, it would suggest a large percentage of the homeschooling population has dropped from view.

Assessing the impact of homeschooling on colleges in Wisconsin is a legitimate concern. The disproportionately low numbers of homeschooled applicants in public colleges mask the importance of this inquiry and raise additional questions about the validity of the data. What happens to homeschooled students when they enter college? What factors contribute to their decision to attend college? How do home educated students perform in college or the workforce? These questions need to be answered and can help to give direction to the course of additional research.

Wisconsin's Homeschooling Law: Is it Working?

Wisconsin's homeschooling law was crafted to create a workable balance between the rights of parents and the responsibilities of the state. The law makes parents accountable for carrying out general curricular requirements, but gives home educators considerable leeway in how they go about doing it. The law calls for the administrator of the home-based education program to verify they are in compliance with the statutory requirements. To do so, parents are required to submit a form to the Department of Public Instruction by October 15 of each year stating they are in compliance.

The law makes local school districts responsible for enforcing these provisions. Over the past few years, only a few school districts have brought charges against homeschooling families who have been in violation of the law. These figures suggest that most homeschoolers comply with the current law. A 1994 survey of 47 families in Wisconsin noted that 91 percent of respondents were in compliance with DPI reporting regulations. Parents who fail to satisfy these requirements are subject to the truancy procedures outlined in Section 118.16(5) of the Wisconsin State Statutes.[53]

Views Toward the Law

Not surprisingly, opinions about Wisconsin's homeschooling law vary widely depending on whom you ask. Most frequently opponents of the current law focus their arguments on the law's lack of accountability and social concerns about home education. Russ Allen of WEAC believes it is currently not possible to answer how the law is working. "Because we have no data on achievement levels of students who are homeschooled, it is not possible to judge the effects of this law. Furthermore, the fact that parents say they will offer a certain number of hours of instruction in selected areas doesn't mean it will happen."[54]

In a separate interview, Katie Schultze-Stout also of the Wisconsin Education Association Council expressed concerns about homeschooling's lack of accountability. Schultze-Stout said, "We are talking about accountability out of both sides of our mouths in this state. I regularly receive reports from teachers of homeschoolers who have trouble working in groups and doing assignments.... We need to do a lot better job of protecting the rights of children who are educated at home, while still protecting the rights of parents to homeschool their children."[55]

Other concerns center around the social aspects of homeschooling. Russ Allen of WEAC articulated some of these concerns when he stated, "There are significant benefits with going to school with others. As adults, all of us have to live in a diverse society and learn to work and get along with others except for a few who move into gated communities or live in cabins in Montana. Parents who seek to 'protect' their children from the larger society by keeping them at home need to understand that at some point they will no longer have control of their children." Is there a solution? Allen thinks so. "Parents should be encouraged (perhaps even required) to have their children participate in state testing programs (they could be tested at a local public school). The results could remain confidential for the parents and would provide them with useful information."[56]

Understandably, homeschoolers take a different perspective on the law's impacts. They take issue with the statement that the practice is socially harmful to children. They readily point to studies demonstrating no ill effects on children from homeschooling. Data on Wisconsin families from Brian Ray's 1994 National study on homeschooling showed that children educated at home are involved with other parents and children an average of 9 to 10 hours per week — rates homeschoolers assert are similar if not higher than their school mates in traditional institutions.

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Data suggest parents are homeschooling longer, but still the vast majority of children return to traditional schools around the middle school years. Homeschoolers assert if the practice is indeed harmful, where is all the evidence? Katie Schultze-Stout of WEAC suggests the evidence is there. In a recent newspaper interview she says, "I consistently receive reports from teachers that some homeschooled children who return to public schools are poorly prepared for learning within a traditional setting. They don't know how to work in groups, they don't know how to work collaboratively... Some are extremely well prepared, but some are not at all."[57]

Homeschoolers assert if home education were a problem, the problems would be piling up at the schoolhouse door. Homeschoolers note the vast majority of homeschoolers transition without incident from home to school. To test this claim, the author conducted informal interviews with superintendents and staff in several school districts around the state in 1996 and 1998. None referred to any transition problems with homeschooling students. Most said students transitioned well. Several administrators remarked that homeschooled students were well-prepared and adjusted well to the new environment.[58] To follow up on statements made by Katie Schutz-Stout regarding the poor preparation of homeschooled students, the author contacted Ms Schultz-Stout and requested that she forward specific information about some of the homeschooled students she refers to in her quote. To date, the author has not received a reply.

Despite the criticism, homeschoolers believe the process is working. Last year, five homeschoolers in Wisconsin were named semi-finalists in the prestigious National Merit Scholarship Competition. Home education supporters contend average scores on national standardized tests and the growing numbers of homeschoolers doing well in academic competition is strong evidence that something is working.[59]

Are Changes Needed?

Does Wisconsin's homeschooling law need to be changed to address the tensions and issues outlined in this paper? Aside from social and academic concerns, a common complaint of homeschooling opponents is that the practice fosters divisiveness, narrow values, and fails to encourage in children a concern for community and civic issues. A review of history and significant changes in the last fifteen years is instructive. A 1990 study by the Wisconsin Legislative Council found no real problems and made no recommendations to change the law. While these fears are frequently articulated, it appears these fears do not resonate with the general public. The 29th Gallup Poll on public attitudes toward schools shows continued softening of opposition to homeschooling since the survey began asking the question twelve years ago.[60]

Sentiment toward homeschooling also seems to be changing statewide. A variety of education officials and organizations seem to be rethinking their views toward homeschooling and the law. Former State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Herbert Grover, was adamant in his opposition to homeschooling and actively sought to gain more state control over the process. In recent years, however, his successor, Superintendent Benson, has sought a more cooperative relationship with homeschooling groups. Although still in favor of greater regulation and accountability, WEAC and other educational organizations have in many respects come to accept the practice as an option for some parents even if they still question many of the reasons why parents homeschool their children. School superintendents appear to be taking a softer line and recognizing home education now has a legitimate role in the policy process. Discussions and correspondence with superintendents in Appleton and West Bend suggest administrators are aware of homeschoolers and trying, to the extent possible, to accommodate their interests as well.

The change in public attitudes toward homeschooling has reached not only the school, but also the statehouse. Growing support for homeschooling among many legislators seems to suggest there will be no real changes in the law. Legislators on both sides of the aisle see home education as a powerful tool for parents. Tom Ziegelbuaer, Democrat from Manitowoc and member of the Assembly Education Committee, views homeschooling as a way to empower parents to gain control over their children's education. "Government should do all it can to make more choices available to parents and homeschooling is one of the best ways parents can enhance and direct their child's education."[61] The Republican Leadership in the State Assembly has echoed similar sentiments. Scott Jensen, the Speaker of the Assembly, believes home education can assist in moving forward with other reform efforts. "Educators who are losing students to homeschooling should upgrade their programs, rather than force these children to return... Smart educators will find out why parents are choosing homeschooling over public education and then improve their programs to meet their customer's needs."[62]

Is the law working? Speaker Jensen summed up the views of many, when he said, "The legislation has worked because it has given parents greater freedom and responsibility for the education of their children. The only appropriate changes are those which further empower parents ability to homeschool. Homeschooling is a legitimate choice which deserves public support and resources like other forms of education."[63] Such sentiments not only reflect

the changing political landscape, but also how far homeschoolers have come in the last fifteen years. Jensen's statements clearly speak of expanding freedoms, a marked difference from the previous goal of merely protecting the freedoms homeschoolers won in the early 1980s. Regardless of one's views, the reality is no legislation directly amending Wisconsin's homeschooling law has been introduced and none is likely to come up for discussion in the current legislative session. These events suggest, that despite developments and issues raised in this paper, the political momentum and public sentiment for more restrictive homeschooling legislation does not exist at this time.

Conclusions

In 1984, Wisconsin passed legislation that granted parents the authority to educate their children at home. Certainly, the growth of homeschooling over the last fifteen years has been a noteworthy trend. Although enrollments still comprise less than 2 percent of all students statewide, the rapid expansion has caught the attention of educators and policymakers alike and raised a number of questions — What factors led to the rise of homeschooling in Wisconsin? Who homeschools in Wisconsin? Does the current law effectively balance the rights and responsibilities of parents and the state?

The results of this investigation are helpful and instructive. Homeschooling emerged in Wisconsin in response to what were perceived by many to be disturbing social trends. Legislation giving parents essential control over the educational process helped to put home education on solid legal ground and helped to remove a variety of administrative obstacles. Recent research paints a profile of the typical homeschooling family in Wisconsin as: religious, white and middle class, where the mother stays at home. Homeschooling families are also typically involved in a variety of social activities and likely to be active in local or statewide homeschooling groups.

Does homeschooling legislation effectively balance the rights of parents and the state? While many members of the educational community push for greater regulation of home education, public sentiment seems to indicate homeschooling legislation is working. Nevertheless, in recent years the areas of shared services, testing requirements, and the impact of homeschooling students on colleges have raised additional issues that will help to further define the rights and responsibilities of homeschoolers as well as members of the larger community.

In 1984, the Legislature said there is another way to provide for the education of children when it recognized the right of parents to teach their children at home. The steady expansion of homeschooling caused many to wonder about the wisdom of the Legislature's decision. What have the intervening years taught?

1. Homeschoolers pose no real threat to the public schools.
2. There is no real evidence to suggest homeschooling is harmful academically or socially to children.
3. The absence of significant data on the performance and characteristics of homeschoolers in Wisconsin is an area that should be addressed.

Nevertheless, the significant and growing array of evidence suggesting the academic benefits of homeschooling is difficult to ignore.

Over the past thirty years, this nation has invested countless hours and millions of dollars trying to understand the factors that contribute to educational achievement in students. One finding that has been validated time and time again is the important role family plays in this equation. In nearly all studies, the family was found to be a crucial factor in not only the level of student achievement but also in helping the student develop academic and life skills as well as individual talents. Because homeschooling provides a favorable learning environment that can do much to encourage academic and personal development, policymakers would do well to consider homeschooling an attractive and effective alternative to traditional education.

ENDNOTES

1 *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. Report published by the National Commission on Excellence in Education. April 1983. p 5.

2 *Home-Based Private Educational Program Enrollment Trends: 1984-85 through 1997-98, Enrollment by Grades and Totals*. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. September 1998.

3 Figures derived from simple analysis of Department of Public Instruction. *Home-Based Private Educational Program Enrollment Trends 1984-85 through 1997-98, Enrollment by Grades and Totals*. September 1998.

4 Newspapers and magazines with major articles on homeschooling in the past year include: *New York Times, Washington Times, Washington Post, Wall Street Journal, USA Today and Newsweek*.

5 See "Home Schooling Concerns Officials." Anne Davis. *Milwaukee Journal-Sentinel*. October 17, 1997 and "Home is Where the School Is." Phil McDade, *Wisconsin State Journal*. November 8, 1998.

6 See Gallup Poll Reports " Attitudes towards schools surveys 1985-1997."

7 "Is Private School Privatizing?" Christian Smith and David Sikkink. *First Things*. April 1999., pp 16-20.

8 Recent research supportive of homeschooling includes "Strengths of Their Own" (1997, Ray. B. NHERI) and "Scholastic Achievement and Demographic Characteristics of Home School Students in 1998" (Rudner, Lawrence, 1999) in *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, Volume 7, Number 8.

9 To answer these broad questions, this study employs a qualitative methodology. Pertinent literature will be reviewed, interviews will be made of homeschoolers, as well as activists on both sides of the issue. Where possible relevant annual data has been used to help describe and define current issues. The knowledge gleaned from interviews, literature and data, is the basis for conclusions raised in the paper. The collection of more extensive and reliable data on homeschooling by private or public entities is a suggestion likely to benefit both policy-makers and the public.

The author has academic and professional training in educational administration and policy development. He and his wife homeschooled three of their children during the 1995-96 school year. The children are currently attending public schools in Middleton, Wisconsin, a suburb of Madison.

10 For an extended historical discussion of education — both at home and in school — in early Wisconsin see: *Public Education in Wisconsin*. Conrad E. Patzer, Supervisor of the Practice Teaching, Milwaukee State Normal School. Issued by John Callahan, State Superintendent. Milwaukee. 1924.

11 "The Shifting Roles of Family and School as Educator: A Historical Perspective." Kirschner, Joseph M. in *Home Schooling: Political, Historical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, eds. Jan Van Galen and Mary Anne Pittman (Norwood, N.J. Ablex, 1991). p.154.

12 For an extended discussion of these views see Holt's books: *How Children Fail* (Pitman. 1964) and *Teach Your Own* (Delacorte Press/Seymour Lawrence. 1981).

13 For additional comments on this review of research studies see "Homegrown and Homeschooled" by Raymond Moore. *Mothering*. Summer 1990. See pages 79-80.

14 See: "Home Schooling: Is it a Healthy Alternative to Public Education" in *CQ Researcher*, Volume 4, No. 33, September 9, 1994. pp. 769-792 and "No Longer A Fringe Movement," *Newsweek*, October 5, 1998.

15 This estimate is derived from interviews with individuals active in the movement at that time. Extrapolations were also made from data factoring in an expected level of compliance with required registration forms.

16 For an extended discussion of Homeschooling in Wisconsin prior to passage of Wisconsin's homeschooling law see: *At Home With Learning*. Wisconsin Parents Association. 1996. pp. 92-94.

17 Ibid. see pp. 94-100 for an extended discussion of this topic.

18 Ibid. see pp. 94-100 for an extended discussion of this topic.

19 Language from Wisconsin Statutes § 118.165(1) and Form PI-1206 Home Based Education Programs, published by the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

20 "State Regulation of Homeschooling: A Policy Analysis." *Home Schooling: Political, Historical and Pedagogical Perspectives*. eds. Jane Van Galen and Mary Ann Pittmann (Norwood N.J.: Ablex, 1991) pp. 113-114.

21 Two recent debates on this subject included the issue of state standards, state testing requirements, and new truancy provisions. In each situation, homeschoolers were able to gain exemption from the legislation or defeat provisions harmful to homeschooling interests.

22 *Enrollment and Family Unit Trends in Home-Based Educational Programs Data By CESA*. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. March 1999.

23 Ibid.

24 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, School Consultative Services Home-Based Enrollment, Alphabetic By Public School District Name, for years, 1997-98, 1996-97, 1995-96, 1994-95 and 1993-94.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27. "Five Year Analysis Table: Enrollment Ethnicity, Graduation and Staffing Data" in *Basic Facts about Wisconsin Elementary and Secondary Schools*. Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

28. Figures from conversation with Susan Ballard, Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

29. *Strengths of Their Own, Homeschoolers Across America Academic Achievement, Family Characteristics and Longitudinal Traits*. 1997. Ray, B.

30. Ibid. page xii.

31. Ibid. page xii.

32. Ibid. See Ray's discussion on limitations. p. 25, 26.

33. Ibid. Chapter 3.

34. From analysis of Wisconsin data included in the 1994 National Study on Homeschooling. Ray 1997.

35. Figures derived from extrapolations from homeschooling newsletters as well as talks with homeschooling leaders around the state.

36. Quote from written replies to questions submitted by Alison McKee. October 1998.

37. Ibid.

38. From Wisconsin Christian Home Educators Association brochure. December 1998.

39. Information from personal correspondence with Jan Gnacinski, October 1998 and February 1999.

40. State Regulation of Homeschooling: A Policy Analysis, James G. Cibulka, in *Home Schooling: Political, Historical and Pedagogical Perspectives*, ed. Jane Van Galen and Mary Ann Pittmann (Norwood N.J.: Ablex, 1991) p. 101.

41. "Clashes Grow as Homeschoolers seek Greater Access to Public Schools" *U.S. News and World Report*. February 12, 1996.

42. See Section 118.145 Wisconsin Statutes.

43. Comments are reflection of discussions and correspondence with school superintendents from Whitewater, West Bend, and Appleton school districts.

44. Replies from submitted questions, October 1998.

45. See WIAA Document "Rules At A Glance"

46. *Homeschooling in Wisconsin:At Home With Learning*. Wisconsin Parents Association. 1996. pp. 219-220.

47. John Benson in "The Purpose of State Testing." Department of Public Instruction. *Education Forum*. Volume 2, No. 29.

48. Statements based on conversations with officials at public and private colleges in Wisconsin and homeschooled admissions data from the University of Wisconsin System.

49. Assessment based on discussions with admissions officials at St. Norbert's College and Marquette University.

50. Conversation with Gail Bergmann, Office of Policy Analysis and Research, University of Wisconsin System.

51. Conversation with Alison Mckee, June 1999.

52. Conversation with Tom Reason, University of Wisconsin-Madison Office of Admissions, May 1999.

53. See PI-1206 Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.

54. Replies from written questions submitted to Wisconsin Education Association Council. October 1998.

55. Katie Schultz-Stout in "Home is Where School Is" *Wisconsin State Journal*. November 8, 1998.

56. Responses to Questions submitted to Wisconsin Education Association Council, October 1998.

57. Katie Schultz-Stout, quoted in "Home is Where School Is" *Wisconsin State Journal*. November 8, 1998.

58. Comments based on discussions in early 1997 and late 1998 with school district representatives from Verona, Madison, West Bend, Whitewater, and Appleton.

59. See "Colleges Clamoring to Attract Home-Schooled Academic Star." *Wisconsin State Journal*. November, 8, 1998. Homeschooled students score high in various academic competitions in Madison, Milwaukee, and in the Fox River Valley. For research highlighting some of these general trends see: "Scholastic Achievement and Demographic Characteristics of Home School Students in 1998" (Rudner, Lawrence, 1999) in *Education Policy Analysis Archives*. Volume 7. Number 8.

60. Gallup Poll Reports. Attitudes Towards Schools Surveys for Various Years, 1985-1997.

61. Telephone conversation with Representative Tom Zeigelbauer of Manitowoc, October 10, 1998.

62. From written responses to questions submitted, February 1999.

63. From written responses to questions submitted, February 1999.

About the Institute

The **Wisconsin Policy Research Institute** is a not-for-profit institute established to study public-policy issues affecting the state of Wisconsin.

Under the new federalism, government policy increasingly is made at the state and local levels. These public-policy decisions affect the life of every citizen in the state. Our goal is to provide nonpartisan research on key issues affecting Wisconsinites, so that their elected representatives can make informed decisions to improve the quality of life and future of the state.

Our major priority is to increase the accountability of Wisconsin's government. State and local governments must be responsive to the citizenry, both in terms of the programs they devise and the tax money they spend. Accountability should apply in every area to which the state devotes the public's funds.

The Institute's agenda encompasses the following issues: education, welfare and social services, criminal justice, taxes and spending, and economic development.

We believe that the views of the citizens of Wisconsin should guide the decisions of government officials. To help accomplish this, we also conduct regular public-opinion polls that are designed to inform public officials about how the citizenry views major statewide issues. These polls are disseminated through the media and are made available to the general public and the legislative and executive branches of state government. It is essential that elected officials remember that all of the programs they create and all of the money they spend comes from the citizens of Wisconsin and is made available through their taxes. Public policy should reflect the real needs and concerns of all of the citizens of the state and not those of spe-

THE WISCONSIN POLICY RESEARCH INSTITUTE, INC.
P.O. Box 487
Thiensville, WI 53092

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
MILWAUKEE,WI
Permit No. 3158